

THE WHIP OF THE SKY.

BY G. P. A.

Woeary with travel, charmed with home,
The youth salutes New-England's air;
Nor notes, within the azure dome,
A vigilant, menacing figure there,

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TO THE BITTER END.

By Miss M. E. Braddon.

Author of 'Lady Audley's Secret,' etc.

CHAPTER XLV.—(Continued.)

"He's dead, and it can't matter now. You've done your worst. Nothing would have wrung the admission out of me if he were still alive. I did suspect him of taking Grace away, and taxed him with it, as I told you long ago. He denied it—I told you the truth when I said that—but I never believed his denial. There was no one else. She was not a girl to have two lovers, and I had seen those two together one day at Clevedon. But he was such a steady-going fellow, and I thought he might be trusted. I'd known him from a boy, and had never known any harm of him; and there were circumstances in his life, family matters, that made me pity him. Upon my soul, Rick, I don't think I could have been more sorry for what happened if Grace had been my own daughter. But, O, old friend, for God's sake say there was no meaning in your wild talk just now. It was not you who fired that gun last night—Joseph Flood's gun. How should you have come by it?"

"The fellow was loafing about the park with it late last night. I thought that he was up to mischief, somehow, and I followed him a bit, and saw him hide his gun in that old summer-house. It was within reach of my arm when I saw him coming along the avenue, with the moonlight full upon his face. The devil put it in my way, handy."
"You must have been mad when you did it."
"Not any madder than I am now. It may have been a wild kind of justice, but I meant it for justice."
Mr. Wort groaned once more, and sat down upon the raggedest of the office stools, in blank dismal despair.

"What do you mean by coming here to tell me this, Richard Redmayne?" he inquired helplessly. "A pretty pickle you put me in. There's that poor innocent young man in the lock-up hard by, as an honest man, it would be my duty to inform against you."
"Go your duty," answered the farmer coolly. "I came here on purpose to give myself in charge."
"You did? And do you know what that means?—Maidstone-jail for the next six weeks, to be tried for your life at the next assizes, and to be hung. O, Rick, Rick, to think that any man of your name should come to such an end as that!"

Richard Redmayne shrugged his shoulders, with a gesture that was nonchalant enough, but accompanied by a faint sigh.
"It's hard lines," he said; "Heaven knows I've tried to keep that name honest. When I was in debt hereabouts, I felt as if I was scorching through and through with a red-hot branding-iron, because no Redmayne of Briarwood had ever owed money he couldn't pay before my time. I worked hard, and wiped off the stain. But I suppose, when I'm dead and gone, the world will think worse of this business. And yet, John Wort, I'm not sorry that I killed him. I was sorry enough, ready to blow out my brains, when I'd thought I'd shot the wrong man. But, by the heaven above me, I do not repent of having killed my daughter's destroyer!"

"Good God, Richard, what a hardened conscience you must have!"
"I don't know anything about my conscience, but I know I've been hardening my heart against that man for the last three years, and it wasn't likely I should deal over-gently with him when his time came. I hunted for him as well as I could; but I'm not good at that kind of hunting, and when I failed in that I thought I'd wait. There's a fate in these things. Providence would throw him in my path sooner or later; the world is hardly wide enough to hide a man from the just wrath of his enemy. So I bided my time quietly enough, but never parted with the hope that I should find him before I died. And when chance did throw him across my path, what would you have had me do?" asked Richard Redmayne, with a sardonic laugh. "Civilly tell him who I was, I suppose, and ask him to apologise for having broken my heart. No, I have dreamt of our meeting often enough, and all my dreams were coloured with blood. Why, I have felt my grip upon his lying throat many a time, and have seen his false face change and darken as my grasp tightened."

"You have nursed your hatred until it has grown into a monomania, Richard. You could hardly have been answerable for what you did last night."

"I was answerable; and I am ready to answer to God and man."
"Vengeance is mine," murmured the steward. "Don't seek to justify your sin in the eyes of God, Richard, but try to obtain His pardon. I don't want to preach a sermon to you; it's hard enough to be placed in such a situation as yours, and I don't believe there ever was a man more to be pitied. I only say this—don't take pride in a stubborn heart, Richard. It's wiser to own yourself a sinner."
"I'll think of squaring this account by and by," answered the other in his reckless way; "that can stand over. I want to set matters right about that young man that you've sent to prison. I want to take my burden on my own shoulders."

M. Wort leant his elbows on his desk, buried his face in his hands, and cogitated profoundly; while Richard Redmayne coolly refilled his pipe, and lighted it at the office lamp.
"Was he to do? Give this man into the custody of the patrol from Tunbridge who nightly perambulated the peaceful shades of Kingsbury—pass him on to the jail where Joseph Flood now lay in duress? Do this with the certainty—or something very close to certainty—that he was landing his old friend over to a shameful doom? John Wort felt as if he could not do this thing."

Was there no way of escape? No way by which Richard Redmayne could get clear off, and yet release young Flood from his present peril? Might he not draw up a full confession of his guilt, get his signature attested by some one who should not know the real nature of the document, and then start for Australia, leaving his confession behind him? That would surely exculpate Joseph Flood, and yet leave the guilty man a chance of life and liberty. Mr. Wort was a man who respected the law and all its mysteries, but it did not appear to him that the world in general would be any better for the hanging of Richard Redmayne. He had also a just appreciation of the penalties to which an accessory after the fact would be liable; but he fancied he might suggest his friend's escape without incurring these. There was no money involved in the transaction, nor need the world ever know that he was cognisant of Richard Redmayne's crime.

"Look here, Rick," he said at last. "There's no one can think worse of what you've done than I do; but I know more of what's gone before than the rest of the world, and I won't be the man to hand you over to the hangman."
And then Mr. Wort went on to suggest, very clearly and concisely, that line of conduct which it seemed to him Richard might safely adopt.

"If they hunt you down at last," he said in conclusion, "and they'll hardly do that, for you can get a good start of them—why, you'll have had a run for your life anyhow."
"No," said the farmer quietly, "I've done the deed, and I'll stand by it. It doesn't seem half so bad to me to stand in the dock now that I know I killed the right man. I'll face the world, John Wort, and let the world know how a man can punish the destroyer of his child. By heavens, if there were more such rough-and-ready justice in the world, there would be less villainy. The law's a big machine that only moves in a certain groove. Let a man steer clear of that, and he may be as big a sinner as he pleases."

"What do you mean to do, then?"
"Give myself over to the police as soon as I leave this office. I thought you would have been in a hurry to do it for me; but as you're not, I suppose I must do it myself."

There was farther parley after this, but Mr. Wort's arguments were of no avail. Richard Redmayne went out into the summer night, and walked along the Tunbridge road till he met the patrol, to whom he told his story.
The man was at first incredulous. He knew Mr. Redmayne by sight, and had heard people talk of the strange secluded life he led at Briarwood. The poor fellow was a little off his head, no doubt, thought the policeman; but finding the poor fellow very resolute, he suggested that they should proceed forthwith to Clevedon—Sir Francis was a justice of the peace—and that Mr. Redmayne should there repeat his extraordinary statement.

It was late when they arrived at Clevedon; but Sir Francis was still in his study, with a London detective for his companion. This man had only arrived an hour before, his services not having been available at the moment the telegram arrived; and to this man Sir Francis had been relating all that George had told him about Richard Redmayne.

"A curious story," remarked Mr. Winch, the detective, coolly; "and it certainly does seem at the first glimpse to have a bearing on the case. Yet it hardly comes to much when taken against the evidence of the gun, which Flood owns to; and of that girl he's been keeping company with, who, from what I can hear of the inquest, seems to have done him no end of harm with her hysterics, and her talk about his jealousy, and being afraid of him, and so on. It does not appear, from anything you tell me, that this Redmayne threatened violence towards you while under that delusion about the miniature; and unless he had threatened, the rest comes to nothing."
"A man may mean a good deal without threatening," said Sir Francis; "and you see in this case there has been a wrong done, and there was a strong motive. Lady Clevedon said the man had a desperate air, like a man who was capable of any rash act."

"But how did he come by your groom's gun? How do you get over the gun, sir?"
"I leave that problem for you to solve. All I can say is, that I know this Flood to be a good fellow; he's been with me only a twelvemonth, certainly, but I know something of his disposition, and he came to me with an excellent character from a gentleman near here. No, I cannot believe Joseph Flood to be an assassin."

The Brinet and Mr. Winch were still discussing the details of the case, when a servant announced that a policeman, accompanied by another person, wished to see Sir Francis.

"Bring them in immediately," said Sir Francis. "Some new evidence, I suppose," he added to the detective.

"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Winch, with a sarcastic air; "no doubt you'll have plenty of mare's nests brought you by the local police."

The job was a good one, and the accomplished Winch did not wish the local police to cut the ground from under his feet by any abnormal sharpness and activity.

Richard Redmayne walked first into the room, alone, unshackled, with his head more erect than he had carried it for a long time; a noble specimen of the English yeoman class, with something of the free grace of some wild forest creature in his bearing, which was even more noble than the sturdy British ruggedness. He was a handsome man still, in spite of the change and ruin that had come upon him; and as he stood calmly facing Sir Francis in the lamplight, with only the table between them, the Baronet thought that he had never beheld a more striking figure.

He guessed at once that this man must be Richard Redmayne.

The policeman told his story briefly, but with a good many "he says," and "I says," to carry him through it.

"And as you was the nearest magistrate, Sir Francis, and concerned in this business, as one may say, begging your pardon, Sir Francis, I thought as how I'd better bring him along here; and if you see any grounds for believing this 'ere rum start, why, you could make out a warrant and commit him. I could get a cart and drive him over to Tunbridge to-night, and he can go to Maidstone to-morrow; leastways, if you think there's any truth in his story."

"I have reason to know that his story is perfectly true," said Sir Francis, filling in the warrant as he spoke. "Abominable as his crime is, I am glad that he has at last had enough good feeling left to prompt him to give himself up, rather than let an innocent man suffer for his wickedness."

"Yes, Sir Francis," replied the policeman, looking at Richard Redmayne with a lenient countenance; "and I hope as how that, and the luck of him and his living farmed their own land for the last three hundred year, will stand in his favour with the judge and jury."

The guilty man himself spoke not a word, but stood quietly waiting to be handed on upon the next stage of that brief journey which was to convey him to the gallows.

"I should be glad if you would repeat the statement which you made just now to the officer, Mr. Redmayne, here, in the presence of witnesses."

The man obeyed, unhesitatingly, telling his story in the plainest words, with no attempt to extenuate his conduct.

"A bad business from beginning to end," said Sir Francis, with a sigh. "You can remove your prisoner, officer. My people will accommodate you with a conveyance, and you can take a groom to Tunbridge with you, if you want one."

"Better let me go, Sir Francis," interposed Mr. Winch. "I'm better up to this kind of business than a groom; I rose from the ranks myself, sergeant."

Not a word more was said. The information was made out and the warrant granted. Richard Redmayne waited with Mr. Winch in a lobby adjoining the house-keeper's room, while a dog-cart was being got ready for his speedy transport to Tunbridge. They drove at a smart pace through the moonlit country, every inch of which was so familiar to the prisoner. He sat beside the driver with folded arms, silently watching the landscape as it sped past him; as if, looking on hill and valley, coppice and hedgerow, for the last time, he would fain have printed every feature of the scene upon his memory, as a picture which he might keep in his mind to brighten the gloom of his narrow cell.

Fear he had none, nor remorse, as yet; but he had a vague feeling that it was sad to turn his back upon so fair a world; to lose the glory of summer sunshine and the freshness of summer winds for ever.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"HOME THEY BROUGHT HER WARRIOR DEAD."

They carried all that remained of Hubert Harcross back to Muston-crescent—secretly, under cover of night, as befitted so solemn a transit. They set up the ponderous tomb-coffin on trestles, in that darksome den behind the dining-room, which was filled for the most part with law-books and parliamentary reports; the dismal chamber where the dead man had been wont to spend solitary hours in the stillest watch of the night.

They brought him home stealthily, when Muston-crescent was wrapped in sleep—that sleep of care-takers and lonely house-maids which falls upon west-end London only of the season. They brought him home and laid him in this darkened study, here to wait the final journey to the Vallory vault at Kensal-green, a grim square stone edifice, nearly as large as a modern villa, with an iron door of an Egyptian design that was eminently suggestive of mummies.

Mrs. Harcross came home the day after this midnight journey. George and Sir Francis had done their utmost to persuade her to remain at Clevedon, but in vain.

"You are very kind to wish it, but I would rather be with him," she said pitiously; as if there were indeed as much companionship between herself and that clay-cold corpse as there had been when those two were living man and wife.

George would have gone to London to stay with her, but this offer too Mrs. Harcross declined.

"Indeed, I would rather be alone; nothing can make me less any less or make me think of it any less."

Her father had arrived at Clevedon by this time, having sped thither as swiftly as his gout would suffer him to speed; and under her father's escort, Mrs. Harcross left Clevedon Hall to return to that splendid mansion which had been the cheerless home of her brief wedded life.

It was a dreary journey and a dreary business altogether for Mr. Vallory, and although he was sincerely attached to his daughter, he would gladly have deputed the task to Weston, who was languishing to be useful, and deeply wounded by his cousin's refusal to see him; a lengthy journey, although they travelled express, and shot the stations swift as a falling star. Augusta sat silent, with slow tears rolling down her pale cheeks every now and then. Once or twice Mr. Vallory made some feeble attempt to comfort; but the dead man's untimely end not coming in any way under the category of happy releases, he was sorely put to it to shape even the trifling consolatory sentence.

Across the dull agony of Augusta's grief there shot the sting of a sharper anguish—the biting pain of remorse. True that she had loved the dead man as deeply after her own nature as wife ever loved husband, but she had not the less cheated him of his due, locked her love in her own breast, starved him with cold words and disdainful looks, kept him at arm's-length as it were, lest in coming too near he should discover that she was a very woman at best.

She had cheated him; that was the cruel truth which came home to her now. She had been proud of him, but had never acknowledged her pride; had paid him none of that tender tribute of praise and even sweet-savour'd flattery which loving women give to their husbands, the humble flowers of speech which strew the path matrimonial, as village children scatter their blossoms before the feet of bridegroom and bride. Every man is more or less godlike in his own estimation, and the world must seem cold to that unappreciated hero for whom no altar fire burns at home. Hubert Harcross had been made to do without such domestic homage. If he came home to Muston-crescent glowing with a professional victory, and in a moment of expansion communicated the particulars of his success, no rapture beamed in the eyes of his wife, no sympathetic word encouraged him to dilate upon his triumph; he was only told that that odious court had made him late for dinner, or that he had only half an hour to dress if he meant to keep his engagement in Portman-square.

She remembered these trifles, and many other details of her married life, to-day as she travelled swiftly towards that worse than empty house where her dead husband was lying. She remembered that interview in the picture-gallery at Clevedon Hall, when he had told her the secret of his life; remembered with a bitter pang how she had refrained from any expression of pity for him, and thought only of herself, and compassionated only herself, as if the great wrong done to him had been only a wrong against her. It was a bitter thing to reckon these small injustices, these petty slights, now, when the victim of them had passed beyond the reach of apology or atonement. Down to the grave must she carry this burden of a great debt; farther than the grave she could not look. She was a religious woman, in a church-going, strictly conforming sense, but she was not spiritual enough to be able to say, "We shall meet in a fair far-off land, where he will read my heart and forgive me."

Very lately was the funeral which for one brief hour evidenced the emptiness of Muston-crescent. All that can be done by solemn plumes and costly trappings, by solemn-voiced eulogies and eulogising Flemish horses, by mourning-coaches and close-shuttered broughams, was done to do honour to the dead. Augusta Harcross could not be dissuaded from accompanying her husband in that last journey. She went with her father in the first of the mourning-coaches, silent, ashy pale, but tearless. She stood beside the vault of the Vallories, and saw the massive oaken coffin deposited in its stony niche, and looked at the empty place beside it, where she might lie when her time should come.

And so ended the story of her married life. She went home desolate to that abode of horrors, a spacious and splendid mansion where "love, domestic love no longer nestles;" went home to find the blinds drawn up, open windows admitting the summer air, the rooms and balconies bright with flowers; a smirking pretence that there had been no such thing as a death in the family palpable everywhere.

A strange fancy seized her when she had sent her father home to Acropolis-square to nurse his grief, and had thus got rid of his clumsy attempts at consolation—a fancy for looking at the dead man's rooms on the third floor, the very thought whereof in this day of remorse had been one of her small tortures. Those third-floor rooms were one of the many trivial sights she had put upon him, one of the little ways by which she had suffered him and the home-hold to know that he was only a secondary personage in that establishment.

She went up the servants' staircase, a roomy staircase enough, for everything in this stately district was built on wide lines, but of a somewhat chilling aspect, the stairs covered with floor-cloth, the walls painted a dingy drab. She went up to the spacious chamber which she had so rarely entered during her husband's lifetime. It was not a cheerful room: the windows on this story had been designed with a view to external effect; the sills were breast high, the lower panes of plate glass obscured by the stone cornice outside them. There was plenty of light, but the windows revealed nothing of the outer world, only three patches of summer sky, no glimpse of verdant park or cheerful squares. The room was large and bare. Mr. Harcross had repudiated all finery. A huge metal bath occupied one end, with all its works and pipes exposed like a skeleton clock. There was a barren desert of floor-cloth, a low wide mahogany wardrobe, full of long narrow drawers (for the presiding genius of the tailoring art has discovered that to hang a coat is destruction); one cushioned oak arm-chair stood before the dressing-table, a chair of the severest school of upholstery, such a chair as Canute the Dane may have sat in when he put his flatterers to the blush on the edge of Southampton Water; two grim rows of boots on a stand masked the fireplace, half a dozen railway time-tables and a legal almanac adorned the space above the mantelpiece; picture, or bronze, or bust, or object of luxury there was none.

Augusta seated herself in the arm-chair, and looked round the room drearily. For how many conventional dinner-parties, for how many joyless receptions, Hubert Harcross had dressed himself in this room! How often and how often had he mounted that cheerless stair and put on the regulation costume, when it would have suited his humour so much better to dine at home and to dawdle away a lazy evening after his own pleasure, sleeping a little, reading a little, enjoying the rare privilege of rest! How often had he gone up to that room to dress, feeling like a slave at a wheel, grinding for an over!

It was not possible that Augusta could fully comprehend how joyless this life of fashionable pleasure had been to him; but she did know that she had often insisted on his going out when he would rather have remained at home, that she had squandered his days and hours by the rule and compass of her particular world, that she had never let him live his own life.

Very bitter is the memory of such small injuries when the victim of them lies dead.

Her eyes wandered slowly about the room that was so strange to her. The sparsely-furnished chamber had no strong individuality of its own; it was not a room which even hinted at the history of its last occupant. There were no scattered evidence of his favourite pursuits, no traces of his presence. It was a room entirely without litter, and it is litter which most bespeaks the character of the tenant. You may read the history of a household on a dustheap sometimes better than in the tric-a-ban of a carefully arranged drawing-room.

"The room is like himself," Augusta thought; "it tells nothing of his life."

On one side of the fire-place there were three or four trunks and portmanteaux, one iron-clamped box, much larger than the rest, a shabby much-battered receptacle, decorated with the disfigured labels of various railway companies, the very box in which Hubert Harcross had carried his books to Briarwood. On this massive chest Augusta's eyes lingered thoughtfully.

"I daresay he kept his papers in that," she said to herself—"old letters, secrets perhaps; a man who told so little must have had secrets."

She took a bunch of keys from her pocket, and looked at them with a faint and bitter smile; the dead man's keys, on a ring with his name and address engraved upon it, each key distinguished by a neat ivory label.

"If he had any secrets, they are all in my power now," she thought. "Or was that one secret of his birth the only thing he ever kept from me? Whatever papers he has left, I had better examine and burn them. I don't want all the world to know my husband's history." She moved a couple of empty portmanteaux which surrounded the iron-clamped box, and then knelt down before it and opened it.

There were no papers in that capacious chest. Only a tangle of unmade silk dresses and cashmere shawls, French silk shawls, ivory-backed hair-brushes, daintily carved by the cunning hand of some Chinese artisan, fans, scent-bottles, packets of primrose and lavender gloves—the things Mr. Walgrave had bought years ago for Grace Redmayne.

Mrs. Harcross dragged these objects out of the chest one by one, at arm's length, as if the very touch of them might have defiled her, and flung them in a heap on the floor. What did they mean? None of them had been used. They were tumbled and injured from rough packing, but all un worn. No scrap of paper, no vestige of letter or memorandum, helped to solve the mystery. There was nothing but this confusion of woman's clothing, a multitude of delicate and costly objects crumpled pell-mell into a big box.

Having cast them forth in this way, Mrs. Harcross was presently obliged to put them back again. It would never do for the prying eyes of Tullion or of any domestic in that house to rest upon those inscrutable silks and slippers and cashmires and hair-brushes. She thrust them back into the chest, leaving them if possible in a worse condition than the state in which she had found them, put down the lid hastily, and locked and double-locked the receptacle. Then with a little waiting eye she clasped her hands across her brow, and sat, fixed as Niobe, upon the ground beside that box.

"They must have belonged to some one he loved," she said to herself. "What other reason could he have had for keeping them?" Her quick eye had told her that the things were of modern fashion, made within the last few years; things that could not by any possibility have belonged to his mother, who had died more than thirty years ago. She could not comfort herself with that idea, as she might have done otherwise.

"That pale apple-green was in fashion the summer before my marriage," she said to herself, thinking of one of the delicate fabrics which she had stuffed reluctantly into the box. "Bouffante made me a dress of that very shade for a garden-party."

This was the bitterest pang of all. She could have forgiven the dead man for loving her with a measured affection, but not for bestowing unmeasured love elsewhere.

"He must have loved the owner of those things very dearly," she thought, "or he would hardly have run such a risk as to keep them." Those cashmires and packets of gloves and plumed and painted fans, such a heap of unworn finery discarded, had a look of luxury and recklessness. She thought of all the stories she had heard from worldly-wise narrators of high villas in the shades of Fulham or St. John's Wood, and it seemed to her that these things must have been part of the belongings of such a villa. The thought led her into a labyrinth of painful speculations. The last idea that could have entered her imagination was that only for a village maiden, tender and pure and true, had these fineries been chosen.

(To be continued.)

KITE-FLYING IN PRUSSIA.—The Marquis de Beauvoir, in his recent book of travel, 'Around the World,' tells us that the old man of Prussia—the "grown-up children of China"—may often be seen holding the string of an enormous and fantastic kite, or winged dragon, or eagle, eighteen or twenty feet in spread, which they guide deftly through the crowded streets of the city, outwinding the time with sails of native-wit. Attached to the kite is sometimes an invisible Zöllan apparatus, which imitates with the most infernal noise the song of birds, or the human voice. The fall of a pigeon from contact with one of these strings explained to our author the mystery of the somnolent waves of harmony which he had for days heard soaring through the air and rising into the higher atmospheric regions. The pigeon carried across the fathoms of his tail, at its root, a charming Zöllan harp, light as a soap-bubble, and exquisitely made. The birds, as they cleave the air, gave a harsh tremolo, or a plaintive note, according to the rapidity of their flight. Instead of this being, as he thought at first, one of the hundred thousand absurd fancies of the disciples of Confucius, our traveller learnt that the object of these harps is to preserve the hapless pigeons from the talons of the vultures which circle in flocks round the battlements.

TONIC WASH FOR THE HAIR.—When the hair is falling off, the following tonic wash will be found very useful: Take half a fluid ounce of tincture of quinine, one drachm of bicarbonate of ammonia, and five and a half ounces of rose water; first dissolve the ammonia in water, then add the tincture. Apply it gently to the roots of the hair twice a week or oftener, if found to be beneficial.